

Ghosts On The Hudson

by Ralph J. Ferrusi

Recently my sister and I reminisced about the Hudson River "Ghost Fleet". Sis vividly recalled Pop taking us to Lent's Cove and loading the four of us into the small, old, leaky rowboat with the 1 ½ horsepower outboard and heading out 'way across the Hudson and behind the rows and rows of World War II ships stored there called the "Ghost Fleet". She remembers the ships being—to her six-year-old eyes—ENORMOUS. She also remembers actually touching one...

Overall, the ships had made an impression on our young minds, but our 2020 memories were a bit vague: for a six-year-old and a nine-year-old dolls and model airplanes were much bigger priorities than a bunch of old boats 'way across

the Hudson River. We pretty much agreed that the ships were four abreast, that there were a LOT of them, and that they were pretty big. And, they were part of the River's scenery for quite a while, and, at some point they seem to have pretty much "disappeared". We recalled that wheat had been stored in them, and the local scuttlebutt was that rodents had gotten into it and it was ruined. We also figured that the ships had deteriorated over time. But, overall we ended up with more questions than "facts": How, and when, did they get there??? Where

exactly were they moored??? How many of them were there??? How long were they there??? When did they "disappear", and where did they go??? I Googled "Hudson River Ghost Fleet" and there were a LOT of photos, and, a LOT of info.

Then along came an e-mail from Ed Radford of Boating on the Hudson & Beyond's Art Department, with a link to a "Croton History & Mysteries" article that had Just About Everything You Would Want To Know About The Hudson River Ghost Fleet!!!

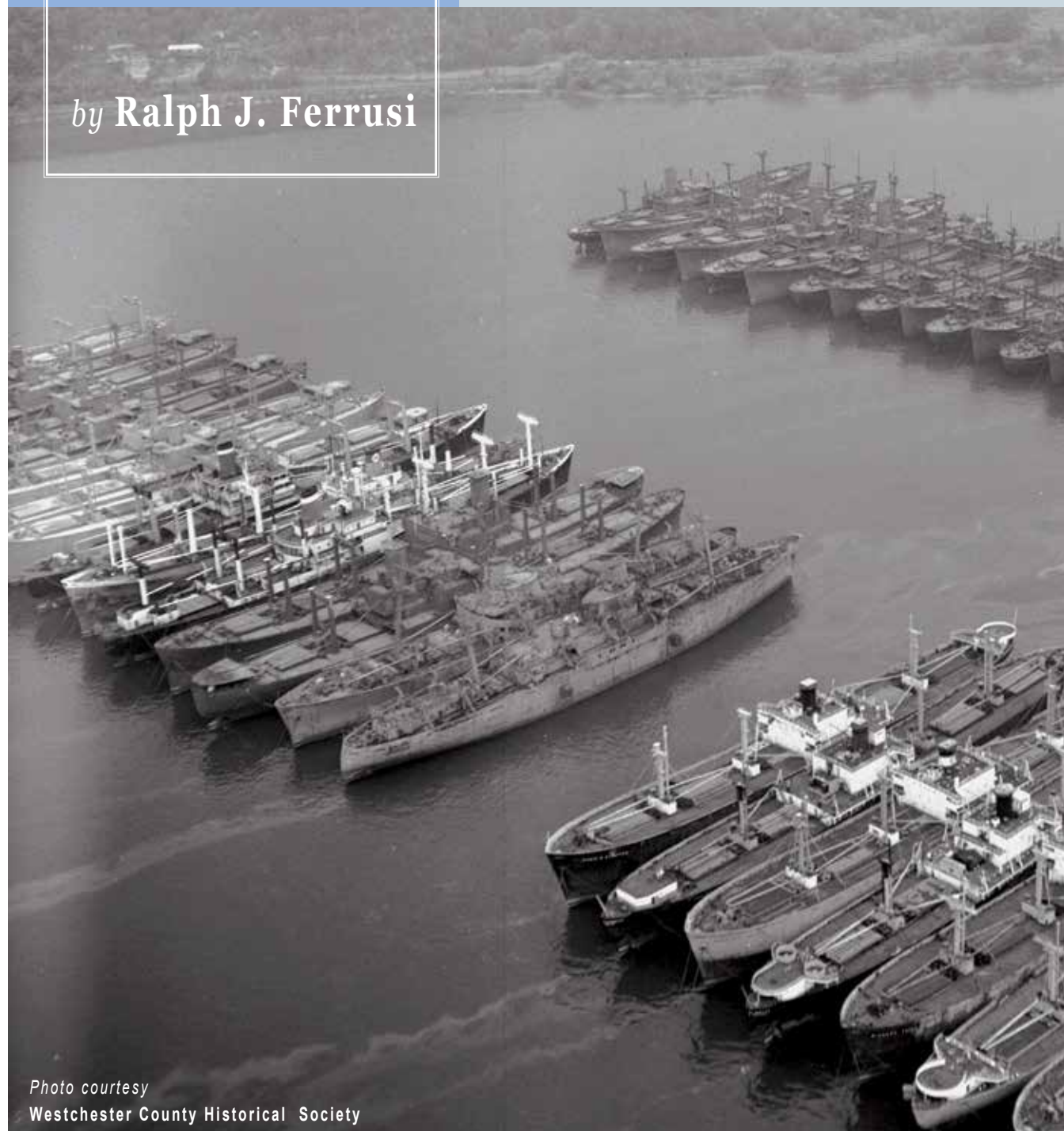
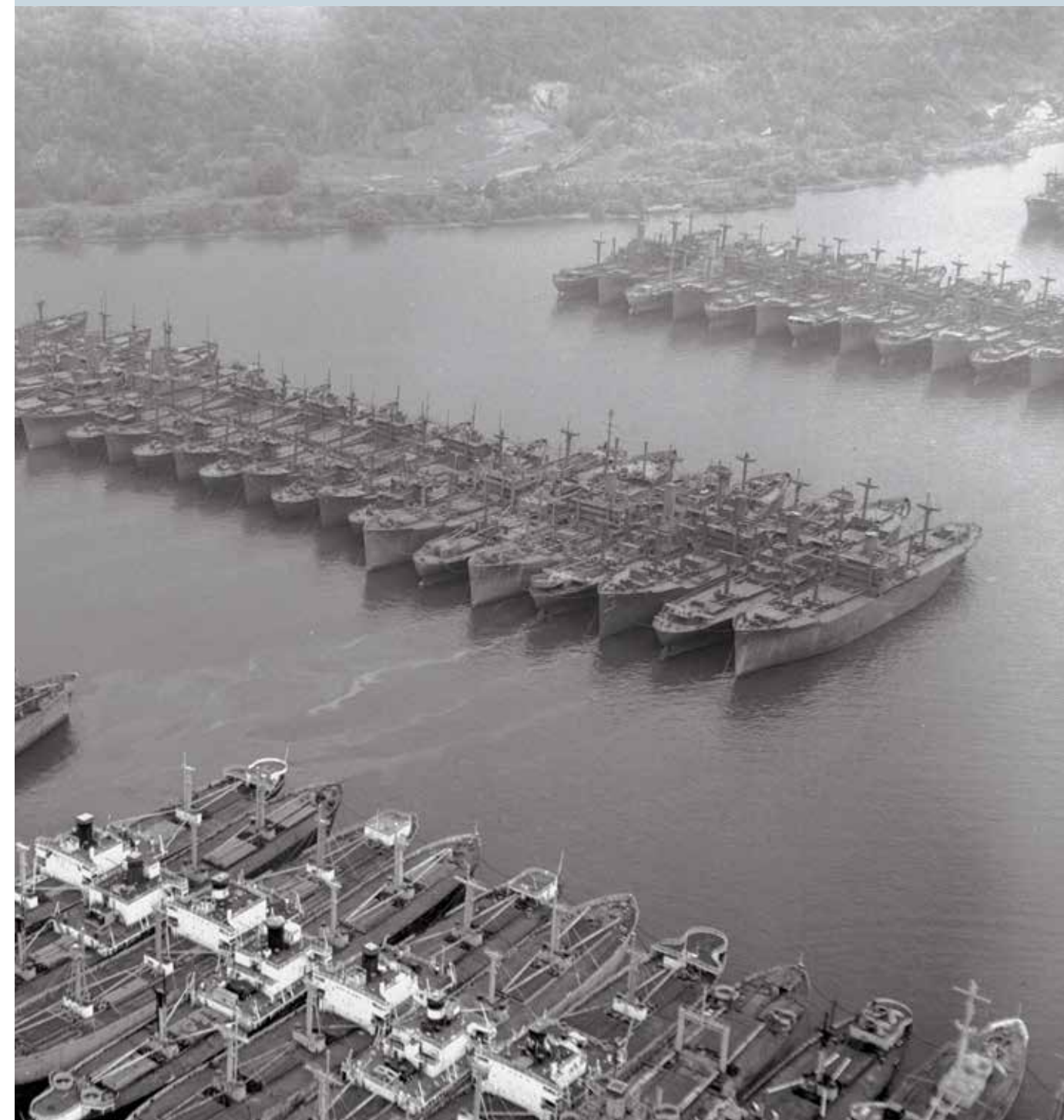


Photo courtesy
Westchester County Historical Society



First Things First: some locals called it the "Mothball Fleet". Its "official" name was, "The Hudson River National Defense Fleet", or, the "Hudson River Reserve Fleet"!!! So, I'll "ask questions", and, let the article information—italicized and indented—provide (just about all) of the answers:

Let's start with WHY the ships were saved: The fleet...was established by an act of Congress in 1946 "to provide a sizable group of merchant ships to support the military effort at the outset of any war." "When foreign nations at the outbreak of World War I had diverted their ships for wartime service, the small American Merchant Marine fleet was unable to transport even 10 per cent of normal foreign exports. Docks in major ports were stocked high with products of American farms and factories for which no ships were available. When foreign vessels were again available, their rates were ruinous..."

Where, exactly, was the fleet located???

...the ships were moved north from Tarrytown to Jones Point (at one time known as Caldwell's Landing) at the foot of Dunderberg Mountain. Anchored in ten rows, it extended from the fleet office at the Jones Point dock several miles to the south—to the Lovett Orange and Rockland Power Plant and the Boulderberg House at Tomkins Cove.

How many ships were there???

The fleet was at its peak with 189 ships in July of 1965.

How about Korea and Vietnam???

During the Korean War, a total of 130 ships were taken from the Hudson River fleet leaving only 39 ships. During the Suez Crises in 1956, 35 ships were put back into service when British and French ships were diverted from trade routes to supply their nations' armed forces. The Vietnam War required more than 40 ships.

When did the ships "disappear"???

The anchorage remained at [its] location until the last two ships were towed away on July 8, 1971, to be sold for scrap to Spain.

What about the wheat???

When the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1953 needed storage space for large volumes of government-owned wheat, it turned to the Hudson River Reserve fleet. During the following ten years more than 53,563,948 bushels of wheat were loaded into 231 ships. Approximately 255,000 bushels of wheat were stored in each ship with the number of ships carrying wheat at any given time ranging from 70 to 90. The last ship was unloaded in 1963. Ships that had stored

wheat rose about twelve feet higher above the water surface and exposed a bright orange band of rust. A ventilation system had been installed in the ships, making it possible to maintain the quality of the wheat for long periods of storage. This saved the U.S. government some five million dollars on commercial storage estimates. None of the grain, sold to foreign countries in the 1960s, was found to be spoiled when unloaded. . . .WOW!!!

How about the condition of the ships???

The ships were kept in condition... by a crew of 86 men under the supervision of Charles R. Gindroz of Pearl River, fleet superintendent and one-time chief engineer on the George Washington, the ship which years before had carried President Woodrow Wilson to France and in 1950 burned at Baltimore. The reserve fleet ships, valued at over \$255 million, had their machinery turned over periodically and their internal surfaces sprayed with a coat of preservative oil on a regular basis. Electrical equipment, such as generators and motor wiring, were cleaned and coated with a fungus-retarding varnish. All loose scale and rust were water-blasted off decks, hulls and superstructures. Then the entire outside of the ships was sprayed with a gray-tinted preservative oil. This was done at least once a year on each ship. The underwater portion of the hull was protected by means of an electric current, a method known as cathodic protection . . . preventing corrosion from taking place."

A Final Word:

This archival mystery about the fabled Ghost Fleet is fitting because Dunderberg Mountain and Caldwell's Landing have long been associated with ghosts, goblins and Captain Kidd's treasure. !!!!!!! Two questions that were not answered by the Croton article:

How many ships were "abreast"???

From photos, there were sometimes 16-17 across!!!

Were there other Ghost Fleets???


There were other Reserve Fleets at Astoria, Oregon; Olympia, Washington; Suisun Bay, California; Mobile, Alabama; Beaumont, Texas; and James River, Virginia.

A Final Note: my recollection is that most of these ships were "Liberty Ships": transport ships slam-dunked together during World War II that shipped vast quantities of troops and material across the Atlantic and Pacific to far-flung battle zones.

And, both Sis and I recalled that our Dad, Corporal Ralph Joseph Ferrusi, was transported across the Pacific after World War II ended from Hawaii to California aboard the Liberty Ship John B. Floyd...






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